

Epitome of Eighteen Histories 9: Awakusu Ninkyō

Episode

T/N: *Ninkyō* is a word for yakuza referring more specifically to the chivalrous, honorable kind often glorified in movies. It can be literally translated as ‘chivalry’.

Epitome of Eighteen Histories 1

Awakusu Ninkyō Episode

This is a story—of past and future.
A story of twisted history.



In the future. A certain park in Ikebukuro.

“You are very curious, miss. Or is fearless the right word?”

A man wearing shades and holding a cane—Akabayashi—sat himself on a park bench while he said this to the woman beside him, who looked to be in her twenties.

“To even think of interviewing yakuza like me.”

As he said this, he looked at the business card she had just passed to him.
Kinomiya Kazane.

Akabayashi, after her request for an interview, had had her background checked. She was a greenhorn freelancer who specialised in investigating dubious leads and urban legends, and wrote for news and gossip magazines here and there. The woman looked at Akabayashi and replied,

“It’s just that the magazines I write for have many readers curious about the lifestyle of people like you.”

“Is this morbid curiosity? Or maybe they admire movie outlaws, those with their personal sense of justice. But it’s best to draw the line between reality and fiction.”

Akabayashi shrugged as he said this. Kazane started the interview conversationally:

“You don’t like outlaw characters in comics and movies?”

“Ahhh... You mean, the types that help the weak and crush the strong, even though they’re yakuza? Well, when I was young I might have thought it was pretentious. If you keep being faced with an ugly reality, there comes a time when you just want to spit on pretty things.”

Akabayashi laughed self-deprecatingly, and looking into the distance, continued, “But if you go on that way, eventually you’ll come to think, maybe it isn’t that bad to have yakuza that say pretty things, if only in books and movies.”

“Rumour goes that you like to look out for young people, and refuse to touch drugs. From an outsider’s perspective it appears you have that image yourself.”

“That’s too much praise. A good person wouldn’t be in this line in the first place. This isn’t a confession or anything, just an example... If someone says he can’t stand drugs, but he goes around beating people up, supporting underground casinos, or even selling illegally smuggled crabs, he’s still a criminal to society, right? What would you think about a serial killer going around yelling ‘I hate drugs!’?”

“I suppose it’s not the kind of person anyone would approach willingly, in either case.”

Kazane answered honestly. With a wry laugh, Akabayashi said,

“Exactly. So I want your article to have it straight. Make sure the kids know it’s not a job you should aspire to.”

“In that case, Akabayashi-san... Have you ever thought of starting a clean slate?”

“Mm? Ah, of course, if possible that would be the best... No, the real best would be if I never left the straight path... But, see, I’m not young anymore. And not so capable that I could choose another way to live at this point.”

His gaze remained far away.

“Why the Awakusu?”

“Hm?”

“From my research, it seems like you were a very famous fighter... There were many groups in Tokyo bigger than them, so why did you choose the Awakusukai?”

“You speak too highly of me. I was just a useless fellow who couldn’t protect his

own boss properly. It just so happens Old Man Awakusu was the one who picked me up.”

Chuckling, Akabayashi leant back on the bench, and gazed into the sky. A cloudy sky that threatened rain, even now.

And as he watched the sky, abruptly, the memory resurfaced:

Of the day he first arrived at the Awakusu-kai, after he had let his chief die before him.



In the past. Awakusu-kai office.

“Da... Chief, are you sure?”

The young head Awakusu Mikiya quickly stopped himself from saying ‘Dad’ as he questioned the Chief, also his father, Awakusu Dōgen.

“Yeah. As I just said, from today onwards he’ll be under our roof as a guest. ... You’ve heard the rumours of the Red Demon, surely? Surely he’s someone we’d want on our side.”

“He’s the guy they say killed his own boss previously!”

Akabayashi.

He was an officer in another organisation that had existed until a few days prior, and was well-known for his violence. A man who, having earned his name on his fighting skill alone in this day and age, had air of the old-style—and was recognised as a dangerous entity.

But ever since his previous chief had been stabbed in the stomach by the Slasher in front of him, there had been rumours he was the actual killer.

No one could be sure because Akabayashi had earlier had his eye gouged out by the Slasher; it was possible that had the Slasher been the true culprit, even Akabayashi would have been powerless to prevent it. Furthermore, the Slasher had murdered the married couple who ran Sonohara Hall; it was difficult to figure out who had killed the chief exactly.

With this in mind, Mikiya’s protests were only to be expected—but Dōgen merely, expressionlessly, said to his son,

“That’s true. But what of it?”

“‘What of it’ ... Chief...”

“The strong feed on the weak in our world. The ones who die are fools; end of

story. If I get backstabbed for this, all it will mean is that I was a fool. Right?”

“ ... ”

Mikiya was speechless, but another officer spoke up.

“Chief, that may be enough for you, but if he seems about to turn on us, we have the liberty to put an end to it ourselves?”

The man’s eyes were cold, like glass marbles. Dōgen just shrugged.

“Honestly, you’re dry as always, Kine.”

And with a sharp look, he said,

“That’s a given. Not just Akabayashi; all of you here are in the same situation, aren’t you? You’re not quietly sitting here to play house, last I checked. That kid Kazamoto’s been raking up revenue like no tomorrow; he’s an upcoming candidate. Shiki, Aozaki, now’s not the time to relax. Keep that in mind.”

After chiding them the Chief left the room, and the remaining officers began to talk.

“...Seriously, what is the Chief thinking...”

Blatantly sighing was the young head Mikiya.

With that he glowered at Akabayashi, and said, threateningly,

“Listen up. I don’t know what you’re up to, but since you’re the Chief’s guest, we’ll treat you like that. So long as you watch your actions.”

“Duly noted, Young Head.”

“...Call me Manager. That’s the rule around here.”

“Of course, Manager, sir.”

Akabayashi’s lackadaisical attitude was met with sharp glares.

But due to his status as the Chief’s guest, there could be no outright hostility.

Instead, Shiki, who had been silent so far, spoke to the scar-faced officer beside him.

“...This is surprising, Aozaki. I would’ve thought you’d be most violently objected.”

“The old man’s word is law. He says do it, we do it. It doesn’t make a damn difference if the guy’s the one who offed his boss.”

Then Aozaki turned his gaze on Akabayashi, and warned the newcomer in a low growl.

“But no one says I have to like you. I don’t care how much you’ve bullied your way around out there—we don’t give prizes for that here, Mister Playground

Bully.”

“Oh, that’s scary. I’ll take note of that, Mister Aodaisho.”

“Who’s an Aodaisho!”

(*1. Playground bully—Gakitaishō; ‘Kid General’. His chat room handle may have drawn from this. 2. Aodaishō—species of snake; ‘Blue General’.)

“Oi, oi. You mocked him first.”

Shiki held back Aozaki, who was seething, and gave voice to his own question.

“But why did you choose to come here? With your reputation, you must have had plenty of offers from elsewhere.”

“Ah, well... With my history, chances are the others would just use me as a spare weapon. And this martial artist, an old friend of mine, he mentioned the chief here has no taste for drugs.”

Akabayashi answered evasively. Aozaki, recovering his calm, replied.

“Ha. So everything goes, but drugs are off-bounds? What, you wanna be the outlaw in a ninja movie?”

“Oh, you’re into movies? I’d like to see you so moved you’re in tears.”

“You little bastard...”

Aozaki clenched his fists and stood, heading for the door.

“I’ve no time to argue with you today.”

He cracked his knuckles and neck, and bloodlust flashing in his eyes, said,

“I still need to go destroy that gang of brats who picked a fight with us, after all.”



A few hours later. Somewhere in the city.

“Really, Aozaki is naïve.”

As Shiki said this, he was walking on the streets of a city long into its night, accompanied by about ten of his men.

“He underestimated that gang. Now they even have his lover’s address.”

The youth gang ‘Gyaraon’. It was formed from former bosozoku members, and they had no qualms in using underhanded means in their attacks; a very problematic

By right Aozaki should be launching a raid on their hideout right now—but Shiki’s network had caught news that a section of the gang had split off and begun to mobilise independently, and appeared to be headed towards the home of

Aozaki's lover.

—Using their own base as a trap, then busting into his lover's home to create a hostage situation...? Or are they just going to lie in wait there?

—Either way, it's a good chance to have Aozaki in my debt.

With these thoughts, Shiki arrived at the apartment—only to crease his brow at the scene that met him.

Two men stood in the parking lot behind the building.

To be very precise, more than ten men were sprawled on the ground, while two men sporting rather familiar faces were standing almost completely untouched. Looming imposingly on the scene, one with a blithe smile, the other expressionless.

"Akabayashi-san... Kine. Why are you here?"

There was no need to check; those on the ground were probably Gyaraon members. But what were these two doing here?

Each of the two offered his answer,

"Oh, Shiki-san. The Jyan Jyaka Jyan I beat down recently, somehow they've taken a liking to me. They passed on a bit of information, so I got curious and took a stroll."

"...I don't exactly trust Akabayashi here. I was tailing him in case he was up to anything, so I helped out with the Gyaraon punks. That's all."

Shiki could only sigh, pressing his fingertips to his temple.

"...I have no words. You do know there's a limit to showing off."

"Your entourage is a bit flamboyant in itself, I think."

"I won't hear that from someone who came here single-handedly."

"More importantly, your men are just on time. Help us move all these rascals onto the cars."

Akabayashi, Shiki and Kine glared between the three of them—before, in synchrony, they broke into chuckles.

"Good grief, what a motley crew we have here."

"Hear, hear. Only Chief Dōgen could gather a group like this."

Kine took in the exchange between Shiki and Akabayashi, and with a faraway look, said half to himself,

"...And right about now there's probably another fool lighting these kids' base on fire."



The following day. Awakusu-kai office.

In the end, the Gyaraon base was razed to the ground.

After being reprimanded for blowing up the situation, Aozaki left the room just as Akabayashi was dropping in on the office.

Aozaki clicked his tongue, and as they passed one another, without even glancing at Akabayashi, he spoke.

“...Don’t expect thanks, Akabayashi. You still rub me the wrong way.”

“That’s perfectly fine. It’d scare all the girls at the bar away if someone with such a scary face liked me.”

Akabayashi’s answer contained an unplaceable amusement. Aozaki clicked his tongue again, and, cracking a grin, replied.

“...I’ll return the favour sometime. Crushing you will come after.”

And with that day as a catalyst, the Awakusu-kai entered what some would call its golden era, gaining significant power under the umbrella of Medei Group—but at the time they themselves had no idea of this.

Other than the man who had assembled them; Dōgen Awakusu himself.



Future. A certain park in Ikebukuro.

“Thank you so much for today!”

“No, no, it’d be a help if kids know to stay away from the yakuza after hearing what I have to say.”

The interview had drawn to a close, with Akabayashi sharing only what was safe. In reply, Kazane spoke of her upcoming appointment.

“I have an interview scheduled with Shiki-san next.”

“Oi, oi, even Shiki *no danna*? He might just be the scariest guy in the Awakusu-kai, you know?”

“Yes... That’s why I want to find out with my own eyes what he’s like.”

“Haha, you’re either going to die young or live a very, very long life, Miss.”

After saying this jokingly, Akabayashi thumped his cane on the ground, and continued.

“...But I suggest you act carefully.”

“?”

“You’re the little sister to that underground doctor we rely on so much, after all.”

“...!”

At those words, Kazane’s expression changed.

“There’s no need to be so wary. Just as you can research on us, we can find your information easily enough.”

“...”

“You know already, right? What your brother works as?”

“...Yes.”

Kazane nodded resolutely, to which Akabayashi, smiling, replied,

“That’s why you decided to interview us?”

“...I wanted to understand what kind of world my brother is in. Because I couldn’t bear to just be afraid, or feign ignorance, or simply assume he’s a bad person and scorn him, or just ignore it like someone else’s business...”

“Ah~, well, I get it. It’s normal to be bothered. Being an underground doctor’s one thing in itself, but that he’s even making deals with people like us...”

There Akabayashi’s face turned sober, and he continued,

“Miss—I’m not saying you have to forgive him. I’m not telling you to turn a blind eye, or stop him at all costs. In fact, you can even sic the cops on him if you like; it’s your family.”

“Akabayashi-san...”

“But there’s one thing you need to know. Your brother may deal with injuries and other things privately, but he doesn’t traffick drugs or do things like that which hurt people directly. ...I suppose some of those he treats go on to hurt other people, so... indirectly may be another thing.”

Kazane absorbed Akabayashi’s words, and after some thought, she smiled.

“...You’re a good person, Akabayashi-san. This is why you’re like a movie outlaw.”

“Don’t get fooled. I’m only pretending to be good.”

******EPISODE END******
